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OPINION

Hardball heaven: 25 years on, recalling a Cooperstown road trip with two buddies

STEVE CORONELLA | FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

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Steve Coronella, center, flying a Red Sox flag at a 2001 game with road trip buddies Joe (holding inflatable bat) and Brian (sitting), along with brother-in-law Mark. COURTESY PHOTO/STEVE CORONELLA

The trip began on a fretful note.

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Having risen at dawn to beat the morning rush hour around Boston, we left the Mass Turnpike at Westfield in search of a solid breakfast and some strong coffee. At the end of the exit ramp, Joe had assured Brian and me, there was a place that would put us right.

Well, we took the corner and there it was, a Bickford's breakfast joint, just as Joe had said. Except the parking lot was empty and a nearby sign announced that the site was up for sale.

We drove on.

A hastily devised Plan B was put into effect. This involved cruising Westfield's main drag, desperately searching for another breakfast place, preferably one that was a going concern. We passed plenty of store fronts, but none promised the type of fare we were after. Finally, in the town square, a makeshift sign above a corner establishment answered our call: Barney's Restaurant. A chalkboard in the window listed the day's half dozen or so breakfast offerings.

Unimpressed but lacking any alternative, we found a parking spot – right in front of Barney's no less (things were looking up perhaps) – and walked in. We took a booth along the wall.

The cook/proprietor – who was wearing a chef's apron anyway and might or might not have been Barney himself – came over to greet us and handed menus all around. He offered coffee, we accepted. With our first sips our edginess and road weariness dissipated. Some splendid food and more coffee followed, rekindling the promise of a most excellent adventure.

We were two hours west of Boston, with a further two to go before we reached Cooperstown, New York. Baseball Hall of Fame, here we come!

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As it happened, this was the best of times and the worst of times for three born-and-bred Boston Red Sox fans, friends since our schooldays, to be visiting Cooperstown.

On the positive side, the autumn weather was sublime and the surroundings welcoming in so many ways. Plus, 25 years on, the Hall of Fame was showing the original NBC broadcast of Game 7 of the glorious failure that was the 1975 World Series, a viewing opportunity we couldn't pass up. (The launch of YouTube was still five years away.)

On the downside, we were a little over 24 hours away from Game 1 of Subway Series 2000 – a Big Apple affair between the Yankees and the Mets – and the souvenir shops lining Main Street, selling anything that might carry a team's logo or a player's photo or signature, were full of up-to-date merchandise. Racks of T-shirts, stacks of caps, piles of official programs – all devoted to the upcoming Series, which for another year did not involve the Red Sox.

In the shadow of the Hall, however, such minor irritations were easily overlooked.

* * *

How does one approach the unique experience that is The Baseball Hall of Fame? With so much to take in, where does one begin?

We decided not to enter the Hall until after six on Friday evening, which meant our tickets would be valid the next day as well. (We also came to realize that the evening crowd was relatively sparse, made up of diehard stragglers or bargain-minded patrons such as ourselves.)

Brian decided to use his two hours until closing to scout out the p
it a general once-over, while Joe and I tended to linger around certain

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displays.

The main gallery, for instance, which houses the over 260 plaques of the current inductees, provides enough material on its own to consume several hours of viewing. To read each plaque – describing a player, manager, umpire, or owner and (mainly) his contributions to the game – is to catch a glimpse into baseball history and into the history of the country as well.

As for the player uniforms, bats and balls, gloves and spikes, baseball cards and advertising posters, photographs and film footage, and wall upon wall of stats and information that make up the Hall's many other displays, I can only say to you fans out there: Proceed at your ease. There is no way to see and digest it all in a single visit to Cooperstown. Like a thief in the night, take what you can, and resolve to come back for more.

To those who don't give two hoots about the game or its place in American history (a growing number these days, sadly), I would say: Stay away. You will be bored, or worse, you will see the artifacts and displays as trivial and perhaps even juvenile, when in fact they are meant to connect on a personal as well as a collective level.

Case in point: We're seated in the Hall's intimate Bullpen Theater watching Game 7 of the 1975 World Series. It's the ninth inning and the heartbreak is just about complete – again.

All around us are like-minded folk who still find a 25-year-old game – the outcome of which is well-documented – a matter of supreme interest. The crude on-screen graphics, listing available pinch-hitters, call to mind an age when an overhead projector was considered cutting-edge technology.

As we watch, Cincinnati Reds slugger Ken Griffey is preening hi
home plate in Fenway Park. Into the theater walks a father and his young

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son, who's maybe eight or nine. After they've taken a seat and looked for a moment at the screen, the man lowers his head toward the boy, who knows only the current crop of superstars, and says: "That's Ken Griffey, Jr.'s dad." (After a 22-year career, Griffey, Jr. was given his own Hall of Fame plaque in 2016.)

I consider calling down to the Hall's main desk to offer myself as a living relic available for display.

* * *

Driving back to Boston along the darkened interstate, we find ourselves caught up in an essentially American moment. After an hour or so of gleeful banter about our outing to Cooperstown, Joe is instructed to get busy working the AM dial. (Another throwback reference!)

The car radio's digital scan tracks down a station seemingly on Mars. The reception isn't great – we should pick up a stronger signal as we approach Albany – but enough of the message is getting through: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, to Game 1 of the 2000 World Series between the New York Yankees and the New York Mets!

Life isn't fair, that much goes without saying, so we enjoy the radio broadcast as open-minded lovers of the game – never imagining of course that after multiple decades of heartbreak and disappointment, the next 20 years will bring four World Series victories to Red Sox fans like us.

Medford native Steve Coronella has lived in Ireland since 1992. He is the author of "Designing Dev," a comic novel about an Irish-American lad from Boston who's recruited to run for the Irish presidency. His latest paperback publications are "Entering Medford – And Other Destinations" and "Looking Homeward - Essays & Humor from a Misplaced American."

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Salvation Army thanks Winchester for Red Kettle Campaign support

To the Editor: As we begin 2026, The Salvation Army Massachusetts Division would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the residents, businesses, and volunteers in the Winchester area who supported the 2025 Red Kettle Campaign. Your generosity and kindness during the holiday season brought comfort, hope, and tangible support

February 10, 2026

OPINION

Yes, Virginia...There is a Santa Claus

Editor's Note: Francis P. Church's editorial, "Yes Virginia, There is a Santa Claus" first appeared in The New York Sun in 1897, and was reprinted annually until 1949 when the paper went out of business. When it first appeared, it was an immediate sensation, and became one of

December 25, 2025

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OPINION

‘Lights of Love’ in Winchester looking for donations this holiday season

Dear friends and supporters: My husband and I founded the “Lights of Love” – Winchester in 2004. For more than two decades, the “Lights of Love” has illuminated our Town Center and downtown area all year round – a glowing tribute in memory of our deceased children, family members and friends whose

December 9, 2025

OPINION

The return of the winter paunch is nothing to worry about — Just ask any squirrel

Over the past couple of weeks there’s been a familiar seasonal sighting around our Dublin house. The object in question usually appears when I’m stepping into the shower or getting ready for bed, and it’s a 100% reliable sign that summer and autumn have ended and colder

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December 1, 2025

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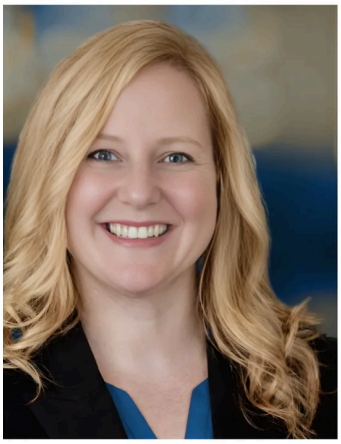

NEWS

FEATURES

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

March 4, 2026

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